



Pennsylvania Senate Aging and Youth Committee

March 27, 2007

Regarding Centralizing Long Term Care Assessments

Good Morning Senator Vance, Senator Washington, and members of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee. I am Crystal Lowe, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging (P4A) and on behalf of the 52 AAAs that serve all 67 of Pennsylvania's counties, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the recently announced proposal to privatize the assessment function. We have appreciated your acknowledgement that this is an issue which needs closer examination.

Joining me today is Teresa Osborne, Executive Director of the Lackawanna AAA, Jenny Nace, an assessor from York County who has been doing assessments for the past 20 years. Jenny can answer any specific questions you may have about assessments. We also have a consumer, Ernest Matzner, and family member, Frances Stover, who would like to share some comments with you.

I would like to start by thanking Secretary Dowd Eisenhower for making us aware of this proposal. As you examine the budget it is not obvious. Making it an issue related to the Budget has given all of us the opportunity to explore the idea in much greater detail.

Let me begin by reminding all of us that Pennsylvania's AAAs were created by the General Assembly in Act 70 of 1978 with the expressed duty "to act as an advocate at

all levels of government and within the community at large for the interests of older persons . . .” It is in the spirit of that specific charge that we are testifying today. It is as advocates for seniors that we want to convey to you that the decision to privatize the assessment function is bad for seniors.

In response to the 1973 Amendments to the Older Americans' Act, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania designated counties as planning and service areas authorizing the establishment of county-based agencies (area agencies) to serve the senior population of the Commonwealth. It was with vision and forethought of the Governor and the legislature that all funding streams affecting older Pennsylvanians were channeled to area agencies - the only state in the nation to do so. This philosophy from our very roots fostered the development of a coordinated, comprehensive continuum of home and community based services beginning with information and referral, transportation, home delivered meals and senior centers, evolving into the broad spectrum of in-home alternatives, which included such options as adult day services, personal care, and family caregiver support. The early intent was to build a comprehensive network providing a seamless administrative process that was easily accessible to seniors and their families and enabled service support to meet the individual needs and choice of the senior. This process developed in line with the mission of area agencies to support seniors in the least restrictive environment and prevent or delay institutionalization. The Federal and State funding, supported by the Pennsylvania Lottery, enabled area agencies to evolve into a "one-stop" shop, minimizing administrative issues and providing services based on assessment of individual need and designed to assist older Pennsylvanians in remaining as independent

as possible. This legislative foresight allowed for the development of a broad cadre of services based on the unique need and demographics of each planning and service area and provided easy access to a comprehensive assessment/service provision process.

In the mid-eighties, a state-wide, standardized assessment process was developed in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Department of Aging and the area agency network. Over the years, this process has been changed and refined, incorporating the principles of consumer choice, and addressing the changing needs of the senior population as well as federal and state funding and regulations. However, the basic premise that area agencies began with in the mid-seventies, continues to serve the Commonwealth's seniors with the seamless access to the services and information they need.

Today, the Commonwealth's Area Agencies on Aging truly do provide one-stop, seamless access to a wide range of services that allow our seniors "age in place" in their own homes where and whenever possible. Today, we are held accountable for our performance by local and state elected officials, who know where to go to get answers on behalf of our seniors.

We are very concerned that the engagement of a statewide assessment vendor will fragment the existing system and create a new layer of bureaucracy that will result in confusion and delays in the delivery of services for our seniors. We agree with the adage that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

At the outset, I want to make it very clear that the AAA Network stands ready to work with the Administration to meet any reasonable standard of cost efficiency in any aspect of our work on behalf of seniors. We welcome the opportunity to sit down with our state partners to discuss how we can redesign the assessment process to meet

budgetary and performance targets while ensuring the integrity of the programs. We also want to identify ways to improve data collection and data integrity. We have submitted numerous specific proposals to various state officials over the past 18 months to streamline the assessment, care planning, and care management processes, with an eye to re-balancing our long term living system within budgetary constraints.

Unfortunately, the Area Agencies on Aging have been excluded from being a voice for seniors on this particular issue. We, P4A and AAAs, collectively and individually, were not “at the table” prior to the decision to privatize the assessment process. Issues of consistency, cost or possible conflicts of interest were never raised or discussed with us. Had any of these concerns been raised, we would have been more than willing to address them in a productive and collaborative manner.

It has been suggested that the AAA’s have a conflict of interest because we are a key part of the eligibility determination process for Waiver and Options services, and then go on to provide these services, thereby advantaging our agencies financially. The flaw in this argument --- and the reason that we do not have a conflict of interest --- is the simple fact that we do NOT provide services and we therefore do not receive any financial benefit from increasing care plans.

We are also confident that a statewide contractor will not and cannot provide services in a more cost effective or efficient manner than your local AAAs can. As long as assessments require an individual interview, travel time alone dictates that a statewide vendor is going to incur additional costs. And on the matter of consistency, we agree that eligibility for services should not be a factor or one’s county of residence, and we are very encouraged that the department is recognizing this as a problem that they are

willing to address. I have included in your packets, additional points on efficiency, cost effectiveness, consistency and conflicts.

We have been encouraged by the appointment of Mike Hall as the Deputy Secretary of Long Term Living, and by his willingness to meet and discuss this issue with us. Our first meeting with Deputy Secretary Hall has been scheduled for Thursday, March 29, 2007. We wish to thank Deputy Secretary Hall and Secretary Dowd Eisenhower for their willingness to discuss this matter with us before making a final decision on this matter.

Before I ask my other panel members to offer remarks, I do want to address one other charge that seems to be directed at AAAs that is incorrect, inaccurate and, frankly, insulting. The charge has been made that AAAs are opposed to this proposal because we are afraid of change. Nothing could be further from the truth. For years we have been at the forefront of efforts to rebalance our long term living system. We have embraced the PDA Waiver Program, the Community Choice Project and Nursing Home Transition - three rebalancing initiatives which have fundamentally changed the way we do business. We testified on rebalancing the long term living system at the Medical Assistance Listening Tour, and in October of 2005, we presented the Long Term Living Council with 18 specific suggestions on how to re-balance in a cost-effective manner. We also submitted a "Gatekeeping" proposal that would significantly change the role of AAAs, by having AAA's become risk bearing care managers in a capitated system. We have provided suggestions to the Department on how to streamline the assessment and care management process to make it more efficient. Copies of some of these recommendations are included in my written testimony.

Our proposals were made because we recognize the need for change. We recognize that fiscal limitations necessitate that we function in the most effective and efficient way possible, and that there is no room for waste or complacency. We have prided our selves in being fiscal stewards but we cannot correct a problem if we do not know one exists. We are willing to work on ways to improve consistency and efficiencies, including the provision of assessments at a reasonable reimbursement rate set by the department. Again, our opposition to this proposal is not because we are fearful or resistant to change, but because this proposed change would negatively impact the people we serve and the people you represent.

We thank you for giving us the opportunity to discuss this critically important issue with you and the members of your Committee and we look forward to productive discussions with you and with Secretary Dowd Eisenhower and Deputy Secretary Mike Hall.

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